

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5103

As of January 28, 2009

Title: An act relating to service animals in training.

Brief Description: Concerning service animals in training.

Sponsors: Senator Zarelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/28/09.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7465)

Background: Service animals assist people with disabilities to manage tasks and to maneuver in their surroundings with as much independence as possible. These animals are highly trained to help people use wheelchairs, maintain their balance, retrieve items, and open or close doors. Specially trained dogs can work with individuals who have autism, with others who need seizure alert response or assistance with medical emergencies. Service animals are typically dogs, golden retrievers or labrador retrievers. Although guide dogs for the blind have been trained formally for over the past 70 years, the training of dogs to assist people who are deaf or have a disability is a more recent concept. These dogs are trained for weeks, and are required to perform certain tasks and meet other standards before being placed.

Once placed with an owner, these dogs are considered part of required accommodation for persons with disabilities under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and are allowed to accompany their owner wherever they need to go. However, there is concern that dogs in training are not given the same permission to enter establishments. Trainers consider it necessary to expose dogs in training to any place a disabled individual may need to take them in the future.

Summary of Bill: The definition of "dog guide" includes a dog in training. The definition of "service animal" includes an animal in training.

Appropriation: None.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Training is much better when dogs are allowed to go anywhere a person with a disability might need to go. This will ensure that dogs in training will have full access to all places and that trainers will be able to fully socialize these animals.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Zarelli, prime sponsor; Susan Malmquist, trainer.